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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MONROVIA 000221

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STATE FOR AF/W-PDAVIS AND INR/AA-BGRAVES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2017
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [LI](#)
SUBJECT: LIBERIAN LEGISLATIVE CRISIS: SPEAKER SNOWE RESIGNS

REF: A. MONROVIA 00184
[1](#)B. MONROVIA 00127
[1](#)C. MONROVIA 00106
[1](#)D. MONROVIA 0083
[1](#)E. MONROVIA 0069
[1](#)F. MONROVIA 0065

Classified By: Political Officer Silvia Eiriz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Edwin Snowe resigned as Speaker of the House of Representatives February 15, but retained his position as a member of the House. At a press conference announcing his resignation, Snowe urged the international community and the Council of Churches to investigate allegations of bribery of legislators in exchange for support to remove him from office and said he would call for a neutral committee of lawmakers to conduct an investigation into the bribery charges. Snowe warned that attempts to protect the "person or office" behind the bribery endangers Liberia's fragile democracy and characterized the relationship with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as having deteriorated from "policy differences to personal hatred." Representative James Biney (NPP, Maryland County) told Poloff February 15 that the House of Representatives received Snowe's resignation letter just as it was adjourning its February 15 session. Representative Bhofal Chambers (UP, Maryland County) told Poloff February 16 that Snowe's resignation was accepted at a February 16 Special Session of the House. Representative Vinicius Hodges (LP, Grand Bassa) told Poloff February 15 that at a February 14 meeting with supporters, Snowe had decided to preside at the February 15 session of the House in order to force discussion of the bribery issue and resign when a resolution to remove him was introduced. Hodges said Snowe called him on February 15 to advise that he had decided to resign that day and suggested that someone "high up" had convinced Snowe to do so. Representatives Biney, Chambers, and Hodges said the House will hold an election to fill the position of Speaker and Biney and Chambers forecast that the election would be held within approximately 3 weeks. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Edwin Snowe resigned as Speaker of the House of Representatives February 15, but retained his elected position as a member. (See text of resignation letter in paragraph 7.) At a press conference held at his residence, Snowe announced that his resignation was "squarely based on upholding the rule of law" and was intended to "save himself, his family, and his life." He stated that he does not enjoy the confidence of the majority of the legislators and they do not enjoy his confidence. He said that the 18 legislators who had supported him since the House of Representatives reconvened from recess January 15 were not parties to the January 29 Supreme Court decision reinstating him as Speaker (See Reftel B) and were free to make a political decision about joining the rest of the legislators in future House sessions at the Unity Conference Center (UCC). Snowe called on the international community and the Council of Churches to investigate allegations of bribery of legislators in exchange

for support to remove him from office (See Reftels A, B, C, D, E, and F). Snowe said he would "remain resolute" in investigating the bribery allegations and would call for a neutral committee of lawmakers (excluding those who signed the resolution removing him as Speaker) to conduct an investigation. Snowe warned that attempts to protect the "person or office" behind the bribery endangers Liberia's fragile democracy. Snowe characterized his relationship with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as having deteriorated from "policy differences to personal hatred."

13. (C) Representative Vinicius Hodges (LP, Grand Bassa) told Poloff February 15 that Snowe had met with him and other legislators supporting Snowe in a 4-hour meeting on February 14. Hodges said they decided that Snowe would preside at the February 15 session of the House of Representatives in order to ensure discussion of the bribery allegations in plenary and that Snowe would resign when a resolution removing him from the office of Speaker was brought to the floor. Hodges said Snowe called him February 15 and said he would resign later in the day because "his conscience" would not allow him to preside over the House session at the UCC since it would contravene the January 29 Supreme Court decision. Hodges opined that someone "high up" must have convinced Snowe to resign. Hodges expressed "disappointment" that "lawmakers are acting like lawbreakers" by not respecting the rule of law. He warned that such behavior had plunged Liberia into civil war and "that another one will take place if we are not careful." Hodges said he would resign his seat if his party had a stronger candidate to run in an election to replace him. He noted that he is not a supporter of Snowe and would have been in favor of removing him as Speaker, but objected to the way it was done. Hodges said that from the floor of the House he will ask for an independent investigation into

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the bribery allegations, even though he believes his legislative colleagues will not agree. He said any investigation by the House Judiciary Committee into the bribery allegations will be a "sham." Hodges said the "credibility, integrity, independence, and morality" of the House of Representatives have been called into question and the lower chamber will become a "rubber stamp" for the executive.

14. (C) Representative James Biney (NPP, Maryland County) told Poloff February 15 that the House of Representatives received Snowe's resignation letter just as it was adjourning its February 15 session. He said he does not think Snowe will attend the House's next session on February 20. Biney, who supported the January 18 resolution removing Snowe that the Supreme Court declared null and void, said the bribery allegations must be investigated and that the precedent is that the legislature investigates its members who are charged with misconduct. Biney said he would not object to the appointment of an independent committee to examine the bribery charges if its procedures were clear. Biney said the House of Representatives has become "less credible" to Liberian citizens and it must prove that it is not under undue influence by the President.

15. (C) Representative Bhofal Chambers (UP, Maryland County) told Poloff February 16 that Snowe's resignation was accepted at a February 16 Special Session of the House of Representatives. Chambers said 32 legislators attended the Special Session; 30 voted to accept Snowe's resignation, 1 abstained, and 1 did not vote. Chambers said Snowe did not attend the Special Session. Chambers described the events in the House of Representatives since it reconvened on January 15 as "democracy in action" and said it is positive that "the guns are not speaking." Chambers said he does not believe that citizens' confidence in the legislature has been dampened, noting that the capacity of members of Congress to explain legislative procedures to the public needs to be improved. Chambers stated that the governing Unity Party (UP) has not yet decided whether it will put forth a

candidate for Speaker and said he believes it should not do so "unless dramatic events" unfold. Chambers said it is important to have someone who supports democracy as Speaker. Chambers told Poloff that he did not take any money to support Snowe's removal as Speaker and that he does not believe any other legislators did so. However, he believes that the allegations of bribery should be investigated and said the precedent is that the legislature investigates its members who are charged with misconduct. Chambers said that the House Judiciary Committee's investigation into the matter will be "objective." Chambers described Snowe as "Machiavellian and traumatized" and as "a desperate man who needs counseling." Chambers said that the best thing Snowe could do would be to also resign as a member of the House of Representatives and did not rule out Snowe's expulsion if he does not attend House sessions at the UCC.

¶16. (SBU) Representatives Biney, Hodges, and Chambers said the House will hold an election to fill the position of Speaker. Biney and Chambers forecast that the election would be held within approximately 3 weeks. Biney and Hodges mentioned the following members of the House as candidates to replace Snowe as Speaker: Edward Forh (CDC, Montserrado), Armah Sarnor (LP, Gbarpolu), Elijah Seah (APD, River Gee), Bhofal Chambers (UP, Maryland), Emmanuel Nuquay (Independent, Margibi), and Kettehkumuehn Murray (CDC, Montserrado). Chambers told Poloff February 16 that he is not a candidate. Murray presided over the legislators meeting separately from Snowe at the UCC. A January 23 article in Liberia's "New Democrat" newspaper stated that Murray is wanted by the FBI for attempted rape. Legatt advised Embassy that there are currently no outstanding arrest warrants in the USA against Murray. According to court documents, arrest warrants for Murray were dismissed by the North Carolina State Assistant District Attorney in March 2006 and by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in May 2006.

¶17. (U) Begin text of Snowe resignation letter.

February 15, 2007
The Honorable Members of the House of Representatives
The 52nd National Legislature
Republic of Liberia

Honorable Members:
I wish to recall that on the 22nd day of January 2007, Her Honor, Madam Justice Gladys K. Johnson issued the Alternative Writ of Prohibition, based on my Petition for the Writ of Prohibition, ordering that your attempt to oust me from the office of Speaker of the House of Representatives should be temporarily enjoined and that I remain the Speaker of the House of Representatives pending your filing of Returns to my

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Petition and a full hearing. You were also temporarily prohibited and enjoined from disturbing the status quo of the National Legislature at the time that its agricultural break was taken pending the disposition of the Prohibition proceedings.

Because of the constitutional issues raised in the Petition and your Returns, the Prohibition proceeding was venued before the Supreme Court en banc, before whom arguments were subsequently entertained. On the 29th day of January j2007 the Supreme Court unanimously rendered its Opinion and Final Judgment granting the Peremptory Writ of Prohibition, which declared your attempt to oust me from the office of Speaker of the House of Representatives unconstitutional, null and void ab initio. In its Opinion, the Supreme Court specifically addressed the issue of venue for the seating of the House of Representatives and the entire National Legislature, which issue was squarely raised in any Petition for the Writ of Prohibition and argued extensively by counsel for both sides. And on this issue of venue, after having referred several times in the Opinion to the Unity Conference Center being situated in the Township of Virginia, the

Supreme Court refereed the parties to Article 40 of the Constitution and emphasized that the House of Representatives and the entire National Legislature shall always sit in the city. Moreover Volume IV of the Liberian Codes Revised Chapter I Section 3 of the Legislative Law Revised 1999 provides that the Legislature shall meet and do legislative business in the Capitol City of Monrovia, the Seat of Government.

Your initial response to the Supreme Court's Opinion and Judgment was to ignore and defy it; but apparently on second thought, you decided to honor only that portion regarding your unconstitutional and illegal attempt to oust me from the office of Speaker of the House of Representatives. Your response was to "reinstate" me to the office of Speaker of the House of Representatives, not even realizing that the effect of the Supreme Court's Opinion and Judgment is that I was never removed from that office. And since I was never removed from office, you could not "reinstate me." That is, I have always been the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the 52nd Legislature and remain so, in the eyes of the law and the Constitution, as at the writing of this letter.

As to the portion of the Supreme Court's Opinion regarding the venue for proceedings of the House of Representatives and the entire National Legislature, you have flagrantly ignored and defied the Supreme Court - the highest court of our land.

You have continued to meet and deliberate at the Unity Conference Center within the Township of Virginia even though the Supreme Court clearly confirmed Article 40 of the Constitution that the House of Representatives and the entire National Legislature shall meet in the same city.

I have endeavored to have you see reason to subscribe to the Rule of Law, to honor and respect the Opinion and Judgment of our Supreme Court but to no avail. On one occasion I even considered the possibility of joining you at the Unity Conference Center to prevail upon you to return to Monrovia, which is, by law, the seat of Government of the Republic of Liberia, to conduct the affairs of the House of Representatives; but it dawned upon me later from agitations from my constituents, that my joining you would have been both in violation of Article 40 of the Constitution and an affront to the Honorable Supreme Court and its Opinion and Judgment of the 29th day of January 2007. So I did not join you at the Unity Conference Center to plea with you to return legislative deliberations to the legal seat of Government and since then, my renewed attempts to have you comply with the Opinion and Judgment of the Supreme Court have been rebuffed.

It is clear to me that I will not succeed in convincing you to comply and subscribe to the Rule of Law and to honor and respect the Opinion and Judgment of the Supreme Court in all its ramifications. On the other hand, I am unprepared to violate any provision of the Constitution, which I took the oath to uphold and defend when I was sworn into office as Speaker of the House of Representatives; and I am equally unprepared to disobey, disrespect and ridicule the Supreme Court and its Opinion and Judgment as you are doing by your continuous seating at the Unity Conference Center in the Township of Virginia.

I sincerely believe that Liberia, as a country, should be our principal interest as public servants; political grandstanding and intellectual arrogance should never ever cause any public servant to lose sight of the greater interest of the Liberian people; and certainly, personal aggrandizement, personal ambitions or motivations should not cause us to sidestep the "good" that our beloved country

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deserves after so many years of civil conflict.

So as I will not capitulate to illegality and unconstitutionality, and as you are determined to continue

your utter disregard and contempt for the Supreme Court's Opinion and Judgment , and considering that you together constitute the majority of the House of Representatives, I am constrained to submit my resignation from the office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives. And I hereby submit this letter as my official resignation.

I pray to the Almighty God that within a reasonable period, the wisdom will be bestowed upon you to realize that it is only through adherence to the Rule of Law and honoring the judgment of the courts of our land that we can truly restore peace to our beloved Patrimony, unite our people bring development and prosperity to everyone, irrespective of ethnicity, social background or connection, religion or creed.

I urge you to have the General Services Agency and other relevant Government agency(ies) take an inventory of all properties of the Liberian Government assigned to me as Speaker of the House of Representatives and to take delivery of same at its earliest convenience.

May God Almighty continue to bless our country and guide us.

Kind regards,
Edwin Melvin Snowe, Jr.

18. (C) Comment. Snowe's resignation breaks the stalemate that has existed since January 15 in the House of Representatives. However, tensions are high among members of the House and this saga is not over. The next chapter will be played out in the election of Snowe's successor. End Comment.
Mazel